Old Saxon

Old Saxon, also known as Old Low German, was a Germanic language and the earliest recorded form of Low German (spoken nowadays in Northern Germany, the northeastern Netherlands, southern Denmark, the Americas and parts of Eastern Europe). It is a West Germanic language, closely related to the Anglo-Frisian languages.^[2] It is documented from the 8th century until the 12th century, when it gradually evolved into Middle Low German. It was spoken throughout modern northwestern Germany, primarily in the coastal regions and in the eastern Netherlands by Saxons, a Germanic tribe that inhabited the region of Saxony. It partially shares Anglo-Frisian's (Old Frisian, Old English) Ingvaeonic nasal spirant law which sets it apart from Low Franconian and Irminonic languages, such as Dutch, Luxembourgish and German.

The grammar of Old Saxon was fully inflected with five grammatical cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, and instrumental), three grammatical numbers (singular, plural, and dual) and three grammatical genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter). The dual forms occurred in the first and second persons only and referred to groups of two.

Historically, Old Saxon and Old Dutch were considered to be distinct dialects of an otherwise unitary language rather than two languages, primarily because they were linked through a dialect continuum spanning the modern Netherlands and Germany. However, while these two languages both shared the same historical origins and some very similar writing styles, Old Saxon shows a slightly reduced morphology compared to Old Dutch, which retained some grammatical distinctions that Old Saxon abandoned. There are also various differences in their phonological evolution, Old Saxon being classified as an Ingvaeonic language, whereas Old Dutch is one of the Istvaeonic languages.

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Characteristics

Old Saxon Old Low German Sahsisk, Sahsisc Region Northwest Germany. Northeast Netherlands, Southern Denmark (North Schleswig). 8th-12th century. Era Mostly developed into Middle Low German at the end of the 12th century Indo-European Language family Germanic West Germanic North Sea Germanic Old Saxon Younger Futhark, Writing system later Latin Language codes ISO 639-3 Linquist List osx (http://multit ree.org/codes/osx) olds1250 (http://g Glottolog lottolog.org/resou rce/languoid/id/ol ds1250)^[1] Area in which Old Saxon was spoken in yellow.

In the <u>Middle Ages</u>, a <u>dialect continuum</u> existed between <u>Old Dutch</u> and Old Saxon, a continuum which has only recently been interrupted by the simultaneous dissemination of standard languages within each nation and the dissolution of folk dialects. Although they share some features, a number of differences separate Old Saxon, <u>Old English</u>, and Old Dutch. One such difference is the Old Dutch utilization of -a as its plural a-stem noun ending, while Old Saxon and Old English employ -as or -os. However, it seems that <u>Middle Dutch</u> took the Old Saxon a-stem ending from some <u>Middle Low German</u> dialects, as modern Dutch includes the plural ending -s added to certain words. Another difference is the so-called "unified plural": Old Saxon, like Old Frisian and Old English, has one verb form for all three persons in the plural, whereas Old Dutch retained three distinct forms (reduced to two in Middle Dutch).

Old Saxon (or Old Low German) probably evolved primarily from Ingvaeonic dialects in the West Germanic branch of Proto-Germanic in the 5th century. However, Old Saxon, even considered as an Ingvaeonic language, is not a pure Ingvaeonic dialect like Old Frisian and Old English, the latter two sharing some other Ingvaeonic characteristics, which Old Saxon lacked. This, in addition to the large number of West-Germanic features that Old Saxon displayed, had led some philologists to mistakenly think that Old Dutch and Old Saxon were variations of the same language, and that Old Saxon was an Istvaeonic language. [3]

Relation to Middle Low German

Old Saxon naturally evolved into Middle Low German over the course of the 11th and 12th centuries, with a great shift from <u>Latin</u> to Low German writing happening around 1150, so that the development of the language can be traced from that period.

The most striking difference between Middle Low German and Old Saxon is in a feature of speech known as <u>vowel reduction</u>, which took place in most other <u>West Germanic languages</u> and some Scandinavian dialects such as <u>Danish</u>, reducing all unstressed vowels to <u>schwa</u>. Thus, such Old Saxon words like *gisprekan* (spoken) or *dagō* (days' – gen. pl.) became *gesprēken* and *dāge*.

Phonology

Early developments

Old Saxon did not participate in the High German consonant shift, and thus preserves stop consonants p, t, k that have been shifted in Old High German to various fricatives and affricates. The Germanic diphthongs ai, au consistently develop into long vowels \bar{e} , \bar{o} , whereas in Old High German they appear either as ei, ou or \bar{e} , \bar{o} depending on the following consonant.

Old Saxon, alone of the West Germanic languages except for Frisian, consistently preserves Germanic *-j-* after a consonant, e.g. $h\bar{e}liand$ "savior" (Old High German: heilant, Old English: $h\bar{e}lend$, Gothic: háiljands). Germanic umlaut, when it occurs with short a, is inconsistent, e.g. hebbean or habbian "to have" (Old English: habban). This feature was carried over into the descendant-language of Old Saxon, Middle Low German, where e.g. the adjective krank (sick, ill) had the comparative forms krenker and kranker. Apart from the e, however, the umlaut is not marked in writing.

Consonants

The table below lists the consonants of Old Saxon. Phonemes written in parentheses represent allophones and are not independent phonemes.

Dental/ Labial Palatal Velar Glottal Alveolar Nasal m n voiceless р ţ k **Plosive** d voiced <u>γ</u> (x) sibilant <u>s</u> (z) **Fricative** θ (ð) non-sibilant f (v) h **Approximant** ı į W Rhotic

Old Saxon consonant phonemes

Notes:

- The voiceless spirants /f/, /θ/, and /s/ gain voiced allophones ([v], [ð], and [z]) when between vowels. This change is only faithfully reflected in writing for [v] (represented with letters such as ⟨b⟩ and ⟨u⟩). The other two allophones continued to be written as before.
- Fricatives were devoiced again word-finally. Beginning in the later Old Saxon period, <u>stops</u> became devoiced word-finally as well.
- Most consonants could be <u>geminated</u>. Notably, geminated /v/ gave /bb/, and geminated /ɣ/ probably gave /gg/. Geminated /h/ resulted in /xx/.

Germanic *h is retained as [x] in these positions and thus merges with devoiced /y/.

Vowels

Old Saxon monophthongs

		Fre	Back			
	unrou	nded				
	short long		short long		short long	
Close	I	i:	(Y)	(y:)	σ	u:
Close-mid	(e)	e:		(ø:)		0:
Open-mid	ε	ε:	(œ)	(œ:)	Э	э:
Near-open	(æ)	(æ:)				
Open	α	α:				

Notes:

Long vowels were rare in unstressed syllables and mostly occurred due to suffixation or compounding.

Diphthongs

Old Saxon diphthongs

	Front
Opening	io (ia ie)
Height-harmonic	iu

Notes:

- The closing diphthongs /ei/ and /ou/ sometimes occur in texts (especially in <u>Genesis</u>), probably under the influence of <u>Franconian</u> or <u>High German dialects</u>, where they replace Old Saxon developments /ε:/ and /ɔ:/ (which evolved from Proto-Germanic /ai/ and /au/).
- The situation for the front opening diphthongs is somewhat unclear in some texts. Words written with *io* in the <u>Heliand</u>, the most extensive record of Old Saxon writing, are often found written variably with *ia* or even *ie* in most other texts, notably the later ones. The diphthong eventually merges into /e:/ in almost every Middle Low German dialect.
- There also existed 'long' diphthongs /oːu/, /aːu/ and /eːu/. These were, however, treated as two-syllable sequences of a long vowel followed by a short one, not proper diphthongs.

Grammar

Morphology

Unlike modern English, but like Old English, Old Saxon is an <u>inflected language</u>, rich in <u>morphological</u> diversity. It kept several distinct cases from Proto-Germanic: the nominative, accusative, genitive, dative and (vestigially in the oldest texts) instrumental.

Old Saxon also had three grammatical numbers (singular, and dual, and plural) and three grammatical genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter). The dual forms occurred in the first and second persons only and referred to groups of exactly two.

Nouns

Old Saxon nouns were inflected in very different ways following their classes. Here are the endings for daq, "day" an a-stem masculine noun:

dag 'day' <i>m</i> .						
Case	Singular	Plural				
Nominative	dag	dagos				
Accusative	dag	dagos				
Genitive	dages, -as	dago				
Dative	dage, -a	dagum, -un				

At the end of the Old Saxon period, distinctions between noun classes began to disappear, and endings from one were often transferred to the other declension, and vice versa. This happened to be a large process, and the most common noun classes started to cause the least represented to disappear. As a result, in Middle Low German, only the former weak n-stem and strong a-stem classes remained. These two noun inflection classes started being added to words not only following the historical belonging of this word, but also following the root of the word.

Verbs

The Old Saxon verb inflection system reflects an intermediate stage between Old English and Old Dutch, and further Old High German. Unlike Old High German and Old Dutch, but similarly to Old English, it did not preserve the three different verb endings in the plural, all featured as *-ad* (also *-iad* or *-iod* following the different verb inflection classes). Like Old Dutch, it had only two classes of weak verb, with only a few relic verbs of the third weak class (namely four verbs: libbian, seggian, huggian and hebbian).

This table sums up all the seven Old Saxon strong verb classes and the three weak verb classes:

		Strong verbs						Weak verbs			
Conjugation	Pronoun	'to ride'	'to fly'	'to help'	'to break'	'to speak'	'to travel'	'to wield'	'to deem'	'to declare'	'to say'
Infiniti	ive	rīdan	fliogan	helpan	brekan	sprekan	faran	waldan	dōmian	mahlon	seggian
	ik	rīdu	fliugu	hilpu	briku	spriku	faru	waldu	dōmiu	mahlo(n)	seggiu
Present	thū	rīdis	fliugis	hilpis	brikis	sprikis	feris	weldis	dōmis	mahlos	sages
indicative	hē/it/siu	rīdid	fliugid	hilpid	brikid	sprikid	ferid	weldid	dōmid	mahlod	saged
	wī/gī/sia	rīdad	fliogad	helpad	brekad	sprekad	farad	waldad	dōmiad	mahliod	seggiad
	ik	rēd	flōg	halp	brak	sprak	fōr	wēld	dōmda	mahloda	sagda
Past	thū	ridi	flugi	hulpi	brāki	sprāki	fōri	wēldi	dōmdes	mahlodes	sagdes
indicative	hē/it/siu	rēd	flōg	halp	brak	sprak	fōr	wēld	dōmda	mahloda	sagda
	wī/gī/sia	ridun	flugun	hulpun	brākun	sprākun	fōrun	wēldun	dōmdun	mahlodun	sagdun
	ik	rīde	flioge	helpe	breke	spreke	fare	walde	dōmie	mahlo	seggie
Present	thū	rīdes	flioges	helpes	brekes	sprekes	fares	waldes	dōmies	mahlos	seggies
subjunctive	hē/it/siu	rīde	flioge	helpe	breke	spreke	fare	walde	dōmie	mahlo	seggie
	wī/gī/sia	rīden	fliogen	helpen	breken	spreken	faren	walden	dōmien	mahlion	seggien
	ik	ridi	flugi	hulpi	brāki	sprāki	fōri	wēldi	dōmdi	mahlodi	sagdi
Past	thū	ridis	flugis	hulpis	brākis	sprākis	fōris	wēldis	dōmdis	mahlodis	sagdis
subjunctive	hē/it/siu	ridi	flugi	hulpi	brāki	sprāki	fōri	wēldi	dōmdi	mahlodi	sagdi
	wī/gī/sia	ridin	flugin	hulpin	brākin	sprākin	fōrin	wēldin	dōmdin	mahlodin	sagdin
Imperative	Singular	rīd	fliog	help	brek	sprek	far	wald	dōmi	mahlo	sage
	Plural	rīdad	fliogad	helpad	brekad	sprekad	farad	waldad	dōmiad	mahliod	seggiad
Present pa	ırticiple	rīdandi	fliogandi	helpandi	brekandi	sprekandi	farandi	waldandi	dōmiandi	mahlondi	seggiandi
Past part	iciple	(gi)ridan	(gi)flogan	(gi)holpan	(gi)brokan	(gi)sprekan	(gi)faran	(gi)waldan	(gi)dōmid	(gi)mahlod	(gi)sagd

It should be noticed that the third weak verb class includes only four verbs (namely <u>libbian</u>, <u>seggian</u>, <u>huggian</u> and <u>hebbian</u>); it is a remnant of an older and larger class that was kept in Old High German.

Syntax

Old Saxon syntax is mostly different from that of English. Some were simply consequences of the greater level of nominal and verbal inflection – e.g., word order was generally freer. In addition:

- The default word order was verb-second, very close to that of modern Dutch or modern German.
- There was no do-support in questions and negatives.
- Multiple negatives could stack up in a sentence and intensify each other (negative concord), which is not always the case
 in modern English, modern Dutch, or modern German.
- Sentences with subordinate clauses of the type "when X, Y" (e.g. "When I got home, I ate dinner.") did not use a *wh-*type conjunction, but rather used a *th-*type <u>correlative conjunction</u> (e.g. *thô X, thô Y* in place of "when X, Y"). The *wh-*type conjunctions were used only as interrogative pronouns and indefinite pronouns.
- Similarly, wh- forms were not used as <u>relative pronouns</u> (as in "the man who saw me" or "the car which I bought"). Instead, an indeclinable word the was used, often in conjunction with the <u>definite article</u> (which was declined for case, number and gender).

Orthography

Old Saxon comes down in a number of different manuscripts whose spelling systems sometimes differ markedly. In this section, only the letters used in normalized versions of the <u>Heliand</u> will be kept, and the sounds modern scholars have traditionally assigned to these letters. Where spelling deviations in other texts may point to significant pronunciation variants, this will be indicated.

In general, the spelling of Old Saxon corresponds quite well to that of the other ancient <u>Germanic languages</u>, such as Old High German or Gothic.

- c and k were both used for [k]. However, it seems that, as in other West-Germanic dialects, when [k] was followed by i or e, it had the pronunciation /ts/ or /k j s j /. [4] The letters c and x were preferred for the palatalisations, k and even sometimes ch being rather used before u, o or a for /k/ (kuning for [kynɪŋk] 'king', modern köning; crûci for [kry:tsi]; forsachistu for [forsakistu:]).
- g represented [γ] or its allophone [g]: brengian [brengian] 'to bring', seggian [seggian] 'to say', wege [weye] 'way' (dative).
- g seems, at least in a few dialects, to have had the pronunciation [j] or [j] at the beginning of a word, only when followed by i or e. Thus we find giār [jaːr] 'year' and even gēr [jeːr] 'year', the latter betraying a strong Old Frisian influence.
- h represents [h] and its allophone [x]: holt [holt] 'wood', naht [naxt] 'night' (mod. nacht).
- i is used for both the vowels [I] and [i :] and the consonant [j]: ik [Ik] 'l' (mod. ick, ik), iār [ja : r] 'year'.
- qu and kw always represent [kw]: quāmun [kwaːmʊn] 'they came'.
- s represented [s], and between two vowels also [z].
- th is used to indicate [θ]: thōhtun [θο: xtun] 'they thought'. ð is used for [δ], occasionally also written dh.
- u represented the vowels [σ] and [u:], or the consonant [β] ~ [v], which was denoted sporadically across manuscripts by either $\langle b \rangle$, $\langle b \rangle$, $\langle u \rangle$, $\langle v \rangle$, or $\langle f \rangle$.[5]
- *uu* was normally used to represent [w], predating the letter w.
- z only appeared in a few texts due to Old High German influence.

Literature

Only a few texts survive, predominantly baptismal vows the Saxons were required to perform at the behest of <u>Charlemagne</u>. The only literary texts preserved are <u>Heliand</u> and fragments of the <u>Old Saxon</u> Genesis. There is also:

- Beda homily (Homilie Bedas)
- Credo (Abrenunciatio diaboli et credo) → Old Saxon baptismal vow.
- Essener Heberegister
- Old Saxon Baptismal Vow (German: Sächsisches Taufgelöbnis)
- Penitentiary (altsächsische Beichte, altwestfälische Beichte)
- Trierer Blutsegen (de.)
- Spurihalz (Wiener Pferdsegen) (de.)
- Wurmsegen (Wiener Wurmsegen) (de).
- Psalms commentary (Gernroder Psalmenkommentar)

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Heliand excerpt from the German Historical Museum

Text sample

A poetic version of the <u>Lord's Prayer</u> in the form of the traditional Germanic <u>alliterative verse</u> is given in Old Saxon below as it appears in the *Heliand*.

Line	Original	Translation
[1]	Fadar usa firiho barno,	Father of us, the sons of men,
[2]	thu bist an them hohon himila rikea,	You are in the high heavenly kingdom,
[3]	geuuihid si thin namo uuordo gehuuilico,	Blessed be Your name in every word [special word],
[4]	Cuma thin craftag riki.	May Your mighty kingdom come.
[5]	UUerða thin uuilleo oѢar thesa werold alla,	May [become] Your will be done over all this world,
[6]	so sama an erðo, so thar uppa ist	Just the same on earth, as [just like] it is up there
[7]	an them hohon himilo rikea.	in the high heavenly kingdom [in the kingdom of the heavens].
[8]	Gef us dag gehuuilikes rad, drohtin the godo,	Give us support [advice/counsels] each day, good Chieftain [Chieftain/Lord the Good],
[9]	thina helaga helpa, endi alat us, hebenes uuard,	Your holy help, and pardon us, Protector [Lord/Ruler] of Heaven,

[10] managoro mensculdio, [of] our many crimes,

al so uue oðrum mannum doan. just as we do to other human beings [to other men]. [11]

Ne lat us farledean leða uuihti Do not let evil little creatures lead us off [cause us to leave] [12]

so forð an iro uuileon, so uui uuirðige [13]

to do [to go on with] their will, as we deserve,

ac help us uuiðar allun ubilon dadiun. but help us [to fight?] against all evil deeds. [14]

See also

- Old Saxon Genesis
- Old Saxon Baptismal Vow
- Heliand
- Middle Low German
- Low German
- Ingvaeonic nasal spirant law

Notes

- 1. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Old Saxon" (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/i d/olds1250). Glottolog 3.0. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
- 2. Old Saxon language at Encyclopædia Britannica (http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9056981/Old-Saxon-language)
- 3. Helfenstein, Jacob (1901). A Comparative Grammar of the Teutonic Languages (https://books.google.com/books?id=SXYK AAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Grammar+of+the+Teutonic&hl=fr&sa=X&ei=ndj6UfXZFtP20gWYhIGIAg&ved=0CC8Q 6AEwAA#v=onepage&g=Grammar%20of%20the%20Teutonic&f=false). Stanford University Library. ISBN 1440056625.
- 4. Lasch 1914, §339
- 5. Altsächsische Grammatik. pp. 126-128, 161.

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External links

- Einführung in das Altsächsische (http://www.indogermanistik.uni-jena.de/dokumente/PDF/Einf%C3%BChrung%20in%20d as%20Alts%C3%A4chsische.pdf) (An Introduction to Old Saxon) by Roland Schuhmann (in German); copy (https://web.archive.org/web/20140308181018/http://www.indogermanistik.uni-jena.de/dokumente/PDF/Einf%C3%BChrung%20in%20da s%20Alts%C3%A4chsische.pdf) at the Internet Archive
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